

look into this policy. I believe we ought to say to the Navy, look, it is one thing if you let people observe something that is going to be happening anyway; but scheduling complicated military events, potentially dangerous ones, just so you can show off to people who will become political lobbyists? Do not do that anymore.

[From The New York Times, Apr. 23, 2001]

DESPITE SUB INQUIRY, NAVY STILL SEES NEED  
FOR GUESTS ON SHIPS

(By John Kifner)

HONOLULU, APR. 23, 2001.—The Navy's inquiry into the submarine *Greeneville's* collision with a Japanese fisheries training vessel has sidestepped one factor in the fatal crash: a program hugely popular with the Navy brass in which thousands of civilians, many wealthy or influential, are invited on excursions aboard warships in hopes of bolstering support for the services and, ultimately, their financing.

Adm. Thomas B. Fargo, the commander of the Pacific Fleet, acting on the report of a three-admiral court of inquiry, is expected to recommend a review of the visitors program and suggest a few rules—some of which were already in place and violated by the *Greeneville*—but the program is regarded as so vital, not only by the Navy but by all the services that it is likely to continue virtually unchanged, military officials say. "There is very strong support for this departmentwide," a Navy official at the Pentagon said. "There is no chance that bringing civilians to Navy units is going to stop. By no means."

The role of the visitors program in the accident that killed nine people aboard the Japanese vessel, the *Ehime Maru*, on Feb. 9 is still unclear for several reasons:

The court of inquiry was convened specifically because it was one of the few military panels that could compel civilian testimony, but one of the 16 civilians aboard the submarine were called before it.

The chairman of the panel, Vice Adm. John B. Nathman, said that part of his charge from Admiral Fargo was to look into "implementation of the distinguished visitor embarkation program," but there was little testimony about it.

Two targets of the inquiry—the *Greeneville's* captain and a sailor who failed to manually plot the location of the Japanese ship—have reversed their accounts on whether the presence of civilians in the control room was a factor in the crash.

"In my opinion the investigation is not complete," said Eugene R. Fidell, the president of the National Institute of Military Justice, in Washington. "Never to summon 16 witnesses jammed into that control room is bizarre. 'The Navy, I think, is collectively desperately concerned not to give up the distinguished visitor program.'" Mr. Fidell added. "They don't even want to talk about this. This is a real big deal to the Navy. 'It absolutely has to do with funding, weapons programs,'" he said. "They compete like crazy with the other branches." Last year, the Pacific Fleet welcomed 7,836 civilian visitors aboard its vessels. There were 21 trips aboard Los Angeles-class nuclear attack submarines like the *Greeneville*, with 307 civilian guests, and 74 trips to aircraft carriers, with 1,478 visitors.

Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld, embarrassed by the incident, said at the time that he would order a review of the program. Mr. Rumsfeld made his statement after disclosures that the sole reason for the *Greeneville's* cruise on the day of the incident was to give a tour to the civilians and that a Texas oil company executive was at

the controls when the submarine shot to the surface, striking and sinking the *Ehime Maru*. Mr. Rumsfeld put a moratorium on civilians' handling controls, but otherwise the programs are continuing in all services. A Navy official said that no review orders had yet been issued by the Pentagon and that the Navy was conducting a review on its own. The submarine's skipper, Cmdr. Scott D. Waddle, is not expected to be court-martialed. Instead, Admiral Fargo, acting on the court of inquiry's report, is expected to announce an administrative punishment on Monday, under which Commander Waddle will resign from the Navy, ending his career at his current rank with an honorable discharge and a full pension.

On March 20, Commander Waddle's civilian lawyer, Charles W. Gittins, seemed to shift direction as he was winding up a rambling closing statement at the end of 12 days of hearings. Mr. Gittins raised the question of the 16 civilians with the retired admiral, Richard C. Macke, who made the arrangements for the submarine tour. Most of the civilians had been planning to take part in a golf tournament, which was later postponed, to raise money for restoration work on the U.S.S. Missouri, the World War II battleship on which the Japanese surrendered in 1945. Among them were oil executives, their wives and a Honolulu couple. Mr. Gittins also wondered aloud about whether there was a business benefit for anyone involved in getting the civilians aboard. Admiral Macke, once a four-star commander in the Pacific, lost his job after he made remarks deemed insensitive, saying that three marines stationed on Okinawa, Japan, who raped a 12-year-old girl in 1995 were stupid because they could have simply hired a prostitute. Although he is retired, Admiral Macke remains active in social affairs related to the Navy, and he is prominent here as an executive of a telecommunications company based in Reston, VA. To some people here, it seemed an implied threat that, if Commander Waddle were to go to a court-martial, Mr. Gittins would raise the presence of civilians as part of his defense and might produce embarrassing material about the visitor program.

Commander Waddle, in his testimony—given voluntarily after he had been denied immunity—said the 16 civilians crowded into the control room did not interfere with operations. Asked twice by different admirals if the civilians were a factor in the accident, Commander Waddle each time replied, "No, sir." But last Monday, the main article on the front page of The Honolulu Advertiser quoted Mr. Gittins as saying that Commander Waddle had changed his mind and now believed that the presence of the civilians broke the crew's concentration at a crucial time. The article also noted that the visitors program "could figure prominently in the unlikely event of a court-martial and prove an embarrassment for the Navy." That same day, Time magazine published an interview with Commander Waddle that said the skipper had "revised his previously benign view of the presence of civilians on board."

Time quoted Commander Waddle as saying "Having them in the control room at least interfered with our concentration." But Petty Officer First Class Patrick T. Seacrest changed his account in the opposite way. Petty Officer Seacrest was the fire control technician, whose job involves keeping track of nearby ships as potential targets for a submarine's torpedoes.

On the day of the accident, an important piece of equipment, essentially a television monitor that displays the sonar soundings, was discovered to be broken soon after the submarine left Pearl Harbor. With the monitor down, Petty Officer Seacrest's old-fashioned plotting of the positions of vessels on

paper became the crucial substitute. He was to have gotten up from his chair and gone to a nearby bulkhead to mark the positions on a scrolling device visible to the officer of the deck at intervals of about three minutes, a former submarine commander said. But some of the visitors were crowded into the narrow path between his post and the plotting paper, and he did not push through them to update the positions. Petty Officer Seacrest told the National Transportation Safety Board investigators and the preliminary Navy inquiry that the presence of visitors had interfered with his task.

John Hammerschmidt, the chief N.T.S.B. investigator, said Petty Officer Seacrest reported that "he was not able to continue his plotting." But when Petty Officer Seacrest appeared before the court of inquiry, testifying under a grant of immunity, he said the civilians had no effect on his task.

"It was very dramatic," recalled Jay M. Fidell (the brother of Eugene R. Fidell), a lawyer and a former Coast Guard judge, who followed the proceedings as a commentator for the Public Broadcasting System. "There was this long, long pause and then he said 'No.'" Under questioning, Petty Officer Seacrest agreed when one of the admirals told him, "You just got lazy, didn't you?"

The main note on the visitors program was struck in the testimony of the submarine fleet commander, Rear Adm. Albert H. Konetzni Jr., a strong advocate of using the program to gain support for more nuclear submarines at a time of shrinking budgets. Admiral Konetzni remarked that attack submarines were named for cities rather than for fish because "fish don't vote." His views were echoed by the other admirals. "The visitors program is the whole thing that's driving this," said Mr. Fidell, the former Coast Guard judge. "Every flag witness said the same thing. It was like something out of 'The Manchurian Candidate.' They are desperate to protect this program."

[From The Washington Post, Apr. 21, 2001]

#### ACCOUNTABILITY AND THE NAVY

A decision by the commander of the Navy's Pacific fleet not to court-martial Cmdr. Scott Waddle or other crew members responsible for the collision of a Navy submarine with a Japanese fishing trawler in February is consistent with the recommendations of the three admirals who conducted a court of inquiry, a fourth admiral who investigated the incident and the record of handling previous accidents at sea. Unfortunately, it is also in keeping with the Navy's pattern of avoiding full disclosure or accountability for its failures.

Two weeks of hearings by the court of inquiry last month showed that Cmdr. Waddle violated procedures and failed to take proper safety measures while seeking to impress 16 VIP visitors aboard the USS *Greeneville*. Among the other things, the veteran skipper took the submarine deeper than allowed, did not order a key piece of equipment fixed and spent only 80 seconds on a periscope search that should have taken three minutes. What followed was a collision that killed four young Japanese fishing students, two teachers and three crewmen aboard the *Ehime Maru* trawler. While accepting those findings, Adm. Thomas Fargo is expected to conduct a private disciplinary hearing for Cmdr. Waddle and allow his honorable discharge from the Navy with a full pension.

The Navy's attempt to justify this decision began even before it was made. The acting secretary of the Navy, Robert B. Pirie Jr., told reporters more than two weeks ago that he sympathized with Cmdr. Waddle and worried a court-martial might hurt morale among Navy officers. He praised Cmdr. Waddle's record; other officials pointed out that